

The Transition from Welfare to Work: Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy's Influence on the Employment Outcome of African American Female Welfare Recipients

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Statement of the Research Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of self-esteem and self-efficacy on the employment outcome of African American female welfare recipients. Self-esteem and self-efficacy represent strengths that welfare recipients must possess in order to transition from welfare to work (Brockner, 1988). However, it appears researchers have overlooked these strengths in regard to African American female welfare recipients and employment (Bound & Dresser, 1999; Corcoran, 1999). In the United States, welfare recipients are individuals from all ethnic and racial backgrounds; however, society, influenced by the media, has used a welfare-reliant, young, unwed, African American mother as a standard icon for this underclass phenomenon (Edin & Harris, 1999). The media further describes African American female welfare recipients as lazy, uneducated, unmotivated and unworthy. In addition, she lacks the necessary work ethics and skills to maintain employment. Due to society's opinion of welfare recipients, each presidential administration has attempted to decrease the welfare rolls by requiring recipients to work (Trattner, 1994). In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the first significant welfare legislation, entitled "Aid to Dependent Children" (ADC) (Trattner, 1994). According to Goodban (1985), ADC was originally designed to help children of surviving White widows maintain acceptable homes and environments for their children. If a caseworker felt a woman was capable of working, the caseworker would offer the woman work for wages, which the woman would accept, if the work was appropriate. On the other hand, African American women were not given the luxury to decide if certain work was appropriate. African American women were pressured to take any type of work offered to them by their employer or caseworker.

In the early 1960's ADC was changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The first work component of AFDC occurred in 1967 with Congress establishing the Work Incentive Program (WIN). WIN was designed to place employable adults in a work or training program but it only impacted 36,000 (24%) out of 627,000 eligible recipients. Weak funding did not adequately ensure every recipient could be

placed in an employment/training program (Mead, 1992). Consequently, welfare caseloads throughout the country continued to rise at an alarming rate.

The next change occurred in the late 1980's when Congress enacted the Family Support Act (FSA). This act was implemented to move AFDC recipients into jobs. FSA required recipients to either enroll in school or enter work training through the Job Opportunity and Basic Security (JOBS) programs (Lehman & Danziger, 1996; Olson & Pavetti, 1996; Sawhill, 1997). JOBS helped overcome the challenges of both human capital development and employment by providing welfare recipients with increased educational opportunities, skills training, more extensive child care, transportation, and other assistance (Neenan & Orthner, 1996). JOBS also raised work expectations, provided sanctions for recipients who did not cooperate, and lowered the child's age at which a welfare recipient was expected to search for employment. Once the youngest child reached age three, the recipient was required to work up to 20 hours per week. When that child reached age six, the recipient could be required to secure up to 40 hours per week of employment. However, strict time limits were not required in FSA. Recipients could enter AFDC, enroll in JOBS, find a job, lose that job, return to the welfare rolls, and re-enroll in JOBS (Danziger, 2000). Although JOBS decreased the welfare rolls, federal and state lawmakers demanded and received sweeping welfare reform.

In 1996, President William Jefferson Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). PRWORA's major role was to switch the service delivery of welfare, from the federal government to the states, in the form of block grants. A total of \$16.4 billion for the block grants was generated by consolidating AFDC, JOBS, and the Emergency Assistance Program (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1999). The signing of the legislation ended guaranteed assistance to needy families. Recipients could no longer receive payments until their children reached 18 years old. In addition, AFDC was replaced with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a block grant that gave each state the power and control to develop specific policies and procedures. A five-year time limit was mandated under TANF with the majority of recipients restricted to a two-year time limit to secure employment (Zuckerman & Kalil, 2000). If employment is not obtained recipients must engage in community service, or risk being sanctioned. Sanctioning is a severe punishment consisting of recipients losing part or all of their benefits (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1999).

Statistics show that, since the enactment of TANF, the number of African American recipients on the welfare rolls has decreased 30 percent from 140,331 to 97,138, and a greater number of African American recipients are receiving welfare for shorter time frames (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999a). With the decrease of African American recipients on welfare rolls, and the increase of African American female welfare recipients in the work force, society should begin to view African American recipients as having the same key employment qualities high self-esteem and high self-efficacy as their White counterparts (Billingsley, 1992; Wilson 1992).

Very little theoretical and empirical research in the area of employment has focused exclusively on African American female welfare recipients and their ability to obtain and maintain long-term employment (Corcoran, 1999). Further, European

researchers usually compare African American women to married women, Hispanic women and Caucasian women. Ak'bar, (2000) states European scholarship in regard to African Americans, lacks validity because African American reality has been distorted and omitted. Therefore, the social, historical, legal and scientific conclusions reached on African American women must be questioned. The historical background of African Americans, which includes slavery and segregation, must be in the evaluation process (Billingsley, 1968, 1992; Hill, 1997; Schiele, 2000; Staples, 1978). Practically every aspect of their lives has been influenced by these ordeals, their life styles for survival, their intimate relationships, their daily coping mechanisms and their aspirations and motivations for the future (Crewe, 2003; Low and Clift, 1981).

Because of the absence of analyzing the data, without accounting for individual ethnic differences, the employment skills and abilities of the African American female welfare recipients are misrepresented, and these women are viewed as having multiple challenges. The literature cites the following challenges to employment: transportation, medical problems, mental health problems, domestic violence, substance abuse, childcare, literacy, work experience, lack of soft skills, and employer discrimination (Danziger, 2000; Jayakody, 2000; Kalil et al., 1998; Olson & Pavetti, 1996). With the dramatic decline (49%) of TANF caseloads, researchers have conducted studies throughout the United States examining recipients remaining on the rolls and the challenges they face in obtaining employment (Kovac et al, 2002). The variables that challenge the employment of African American female welfare recipients are important and deserve further examination from a cultural perspective. However, the psychosocial variables (self-esteem, depression, self-confidence, and self-efficacy) related to African American female welfare recipients who have successfully gained employment, are also important, and these variables have not been closely examined. They are critical to understanding African American female welfare recipient and their success with employment (Brown, 2001; Jayaratne, 1980; Schmit, Amel & Ryan, 1993).

The literature reveals that self-esteem and self-efficacy are two variables that assist persons with gaining and maintaining employment (Jayaratne, 1980). These variables are integral parts of the African American female welfare recipient's world. Self-esteem and self-efficacy manifest themselves as African American women strive to obtain the American dream, full-time employment so they can care for their children (Jayaratne, 1980). Researching these independent variables broadened the understanding of how they influenced the employment outcome of African American female welfare recipients.

Research Background, Theories and Hypotheses

Self-esteem and African American Female Welfare Recipient

How self-esteem affects employment and unemployment has been widely studied. Self-esteem acts as a motivator. It inspires behavior and influences major life events such as college, marriage and employment. The literature suggests that the level of a person's self-esteem is predictive of their job search efforts, vocational choice, and attitude toward work, job performance and satisfaction.

Self-esteem seems to be an important determinant for success for women on welfare (East, 1999). The research on self-esteem generally indicates that welfare recipients high in self-esteem are happier and more effective in meeting environmental demands, which include managing the welfare system and managing work (East, 1999). Unfortunately, empirical studies focusing on African American welfare recipients' self-esteem and employment have not been vigorously researched, although it has been shown through research that self-esteem may play an important role in women transitioning from welfare to work (Brown, 2001; Jayaratne, 1980; Kunz, 1999; East, 1999; Nichols, 2002).

Hills-Collins (1991) states that African American women are one of the most oppressed, marginalized, and devalued members of the American society. Most of what we know about the self-esteem of African Americans comes from children and adolescent samples, rather than adults (Riley, 2003). The lack of studies of adult African American female welfare recipients may be due to researchers' conceptual thinking that African Americans have nothing significant (positive) to contribute to the growing body of literature on self-esteem, welfare reform, or any other issue that may impact women of color. Or, the lack of the research may be due to western society's opinion of unemployed persons. Being employed is normal and valued, while unemployed persons or working poor persons are viewed as abnormal, deviant and psychologically harmful (Hartley, 1980).

Jayaratne (1980) examined and compared self-esteem among African American (n=132) and White welfare recipients (n=135). Groups were similar in age, work status, and education. The analysis revealed no major differences in self-esteem and each group acknowledged work as a determinant of self-esteem. However, having children influenced the self-esteem of African Americans, while education influenced the self-esteem of Whites. In the majority of welfare reform studies, low self-esteem was found to be prevalent in low income African American women. Yet, most of the research completed, relates to other mental health issues, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety (Danziger, 2000; Pavetti, 1997).

Self-efficacy and African American Female Welfare Recipients

Self-efficacy is intimately involved with employment (Eden & Aviram, 1993). Self-efficacy is acquired gradually through the development of complex cognitive, social, linguistic, and/or physical skills that are obtained through experience (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is formed by an individual's assessment of the availability of resources and constraints, both personal and situational, which may affect future performances (Bandura, 1997).

According to Gutierrez (1990), self-efficacy is involved in empowering women of color by strengthening their ego functioning, assisting them with developing a sense of personal power and initiative, increasing their ability to act. To date, empirical research on self-efficacy and African American female welfare recipients is limited. In 2002, Ferrari conducted a study examining the self-efficacy of African American female welfare and Latino welfare recipients who entered and completed an employment program. Study results showed that African American women who participated in the program entered and completed the program with significantly higher levels of self-

efficacy than their Latino counterparts. Ferrari notes that African American women's personal perception and image of themselves are different than other minority women and future research is needed to examine individual ethnic differences.

African American women's images of themselves, and work, are those of strong, resourceful, resilient persons who have managed continuously to survive unusual hardships and define their own femininity (Aguilar, 1993; Harrison, 1977). These images have been projected in popular and professional writings as a result of individual and group perceptions and assumptions, rather than extensive empirical investigations by social scientists (Aguilar, 1993; Harrison, 1989). Yet, they have prevailed in scientific literature, historical material, and artistic endeavors. One of the contributing factors to these images has been African American women's participation in the labor market over their life span (Harrison, 1989)

Employment Outcome and African American Women

Historically, scholars have approached the subject of minority women from a negative perspective and have often considered the traits of minority women, such as color, language, gestures, customs, rituals, and symbols to be deviant because they are different from the majority (Aguilar, 1993). Collins (1990) reported that the image of the matriarch surrounds African American woman and relates to their experiences in the labor market. Collins states that the matriarch is a single, overly aggressive, African American woman with children. These types of perspectives have contributed to the paucity of empirical research surrounding the success and achievement of employed African American women (Aguilar, 1993).

Research shows that White women are making tremendous progress in the workplace, but less research exists to address how African American women are faring in the workplace (Jackson, 1994). Much of the research on working African American women has concerned itself with objective labor market indices (e.g., rates of participation, occupation, and salary equity). Few studies have examined the psychosocial aspects that affect and motivate African American women to succeed in the United States labor market (Mays, Jackson, Coleman, 1996).

African American women have held jobs most persons only envision for males (farm hands, landscaping, construction workers, doctors and lawyers, etc.) while others maintain traditional female jobs, such as, domestic workers, cooks, nurses, teachers, social workers, administrative assistants, etc. It is reasonable to speculate that the satisfaction of being a working member of society, contributing to the welfare of their community, and financially supporting and nurturing their families are the reasons African American women have been able to maintain a healthy psychological state of well-being, in spite of the negative messages from the research community concerning them (Aguilar, 1993; Harrison, 1989; Jackson, 1994).

In 1993, Marian Aguilar and Lorece Williams conducted a descriptive study of factors contributing to the success and achievement of minority women. The sample included 164 Hispanic women and 160 African American women. All women ranged in age from 20 to 75 years old. Information obtained from the study was reported in five categories: 1) Self- Definition of Success, 2) Racism and Ethnicity, 3) Support Systems, 4) Cultural Strengths, and 5) Personal Strengths. In the personal strengths category,

respondents reported that strong self-esteem and self-motivation, resilience, persistence, determination, and an optimistic point of view aided them with reaching their personal and professional goals. Overall, the women identified eight factors that contributed to their success: achievement of goals, job satisfaction, self-esteem, education and skills, family support and stability, personal strengths, ethnic pride, and community commitment. They also revealed that the road to success was long and hard because of internal and external constraints. Internal was their family and community. External were oppressions, such as, racism and sexism.

According to Harrison (1989), African American women redefine the notion of womanhood to integrate the concepts of work, achievement, and independence into their roles as women. In the lives of African American women, work and family converge and influence one another (Harrison, 1989, Aguilar, 1993). They feel good about themselves and have a high respect for the competence of other African American women who are working, regardless of their chosen profession (Harrison, 1989).

Theories

Several conceptual frameworks guided this research on the relationship that exists in regards to African American females' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and employment: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems, Chestang's, Character Development in an Hostile Environment and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. These theories embrace and interpret a person's culture, environment and behavior. Social work practitioners can utilize these frameworks when evaluating African Americans transitioning from welfare to work.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed for this study:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference between respondents' level of self-esteem before and after treatment.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between self-esteem before employment and employment outcome.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between respondents' level of self-efficacy before and after treatment.

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive correlation between self-efficacy before employment and employment outcome.

Methodology

In order to test the relationship among the variables self-esteem, self-efficacy and employment, a quantitative, quasi-experimental, time series research design was utilized. The time series design is a single group pretest/posttest design. A single group of subjects

are given a pretest, the treatment, and then the posttest (McMillan, 2004). The results are determined by comparing the pretest score to the posttest score.

A convenience sample was recruited from three job readiness programs (treatment) located in the eastern region of Virginia. The survey respondents' were ages 18 to 57, with at least one child under the age of 16, with no known mental health pathologies or no known criminal record. Before treatment, (time 1), 101 respondents participated in the study, and after treatment, (time 2), 57 respondents participated in the study.

Study respondents completed the Welfare Reform Employment Outcome Research Survey designed by the principal investigator. The survey measured demographic data, employment history, family structure, and employment challenges. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, measured respondents' self-esteem, and the Job Search Self-Efficacy scale, measured respondents' job search behavior.

The statistical analyses employed to describe the influence of self-esteem and self-efficacy on employment was the Pearson's r and the paired t -test.

Results

Research results demonstrated the job readiness program had no significant influence on the self-esteem of African American female welfare recipients. There is a positive, strong correlation between self-esteem before and after treatment. However, the job readiness program influenced recipients' self-efficacy. The research results found a significant difference between recipients' levels of self-efficacy before and after treatment. In addition results illustrated self-esteem and self-efficacy was highly correlated.

The results of this study are important to professionals assisting this population. First, findings demonstrate recipients' did not have low self-esteem upon entering or exiting the job readiness program. Study respondents felt confident about themselves prior to entering the job readiness program. Secondly, findings illustrate recipients' self-efficacy increased while participating in the class, but decreased after exiting the program.

The results of this study demonstrate the need for African American female welfare recipients to complete an assessment, which identifies employment strengths and challenges before they are required to enter the job search process. One of the assumptions for this research study is that by identifying and building upon existing strengths, and challenges, resources could be made available to empower African American female welfare recipients to retain employment, and or to complete an educational/training program (Wilson, 1992). Education and training are empowering tools for the African American female welfare recipient. These components are key to eliminating poverty and gaining self-sufficiency.

Utility for Social Work Practice

According to Gutierrez (1990), the unique needs of women of color in particular poor women have rarely been presented in the social work literature. White (1980) states that African American women are the least understood individuals in the history of this country. When research has been conducted with African Americans, the focus tended to

be on African American men. Moreover, when research has been conducted with women, the focus tended to be on White women. Examining the strengths of African American female welfare recipients, confronts the myth that recipients are not working because they are lazy, unreliable, and lack work ethics. The information generated by this study will assist social workers with gaining a thorough understanding of the social, political and historical forces that challenge African American female recipients' self-esteem and self-efficacy as they enter the work force.

Finally, this study addresses a gap in the literature by linking the positive relationship among self-esteem, self-efficacy and the employment outcome of African American female welfare recipients. Pavetti, Olson, Nightgale, Duke, and Issac (1997) argue that self-esteem and self-efficacy are germane to a successful transition from welfare to work, acting synergistically to motivate welfare recipients to persist in the face of difficulties and to respond to challenges and opportunities more resourcefully and efficiently.

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Appendix

Results of Hypotheses I

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference between respondents' level of self-esteem before and after treatment.

In order to test Hypothesis I a pearson r and paired t-test were conducted. Table I, shows the results of the test of hypotheses using the correlation coefficient. The pearson r was significant at better than the 0.01 significance level with $r=.713$, and $p\text{-value}=.000$. This means that there is a strong, positive correlation between self-esteem before and after treatment. It also means the respondents pretty much stayed in the same position in relationship to one another after treatment (job readiness program) as they were before treatment. Based on the results of this test, the hypothesis was accepted.

Table 1.1. Correlation Between Study Respondents Overall Self-Esteem Scores Before and After Treatment

Overall Self-esteem (B)	Overall Self-esteem (A)
Correlation Coefficient	P
.713**	.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

B=before treatment

A=after treatment

A paired t-test was conducted separately for each one of the variables that were added to obtain the overall self-esteem measure. Table IA summarizes the results of the test. Each t-test, at the .05 significant level, indicated there was no difference between respondents' level of self-esteem before and after treatment. This means there was not a major increase nor decrease in the respondent's self-esteem scores before or after treatment. Based on the results of this test, the hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1.2. T-test of Mean Difference of Study Respondents Level of Self-Esteem Before and After Treatment (On The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) For each Self-Esteem item Separately

Questions	M (B)	M (A)	M (D)	t	P-value
A	2.0526	2.2807	.22807	1.663	.102
B	2.2105	2.3509	.14035	1.240	.220
C	2.5965	2.5088	-.08772	-.927	.358
D	2.6316	2.5614	-.07018	-.851	.399
E	2.3333	2.2807	-.05263	-.504	.616
F	2.0175	2.0526	.03509	.231	.818
G	2.4912	2.4386	-.05263	-.434	.666
H	1.8772	1.9825	.10526	.704	.484
I	2.3860	2.4035	.01754	.151	.880
J	2.5088	2.4737	-.0350	-.331	.742

B=before treatment

A=after treatment

D=difference

Results of Hypotheses 2.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between self-esteem before employment and employment outcome.

In order to test Hypothesis II, a pearson r was conducted on study respondents' (n=57) data to determine the strength and direction of the correlation that existed between self-esteem before employment and employment outcome. Based on the results of the analysis this hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2.1. Correlation Between Study Respondents Self –Esteem Scores Before Employment and Employment Outcome

Self-esteem	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
*A	.277	.018
B	.142	.146
C	.040	.385
D	.006	.481
*E	.242	.035
F	.070	.303
G	-.037	.393
H	-.012	.466
*I	.288	.044
J	.093	.246

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed)

Results of Hypotheses 3.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between respondents' levels of self-efficacy before and after treatment.

In order to test hypothesis III, a pearson r and paired t-test was conducted on study respondents (n=57) overall self-efficacy scores obtained on the Job Search Self-Efficacy Scale before and after treatment (Job Readiness Class). Table III shows the results of the pearson r. The pearson r, conducted at the 0.01 significance level, was found to be a statistically significant $r=.707$ and $p\text{-value}=.000$. This means that there is a statistically significant correlation between self-efficacy before and after treatment.

Table 3.1. Correlation Between Study Respondents Overall Self –Efficacy Scores Before and After Treatment (On The Job Search Self-Efficacy Scale)

Overall Self-efficacy (B)	Overall Self-efficacy (A)
Correlation Coefficient	P-value
.707	.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 3.2. shows the results of the paired t-test for the overall self-efficacy before and after treatment. The paired t-test, conducted at 0.05 level of significance was found to be statistically significant, p -value=.000.

Table 3.2. T-test of Mean Difference of Study Respondents Overall Sum of Self-Efficacy Score Before and After Treatment On The Job Search Self-efficacy Scale

	M	M	M	t	p-value
(B)	(A)	(D)			
Self-efficacy	26.6140	28.0877	1.47368	-3.959	.000

B=before treatment

A=after treatment

D=difference

Results of Hypotheses 4.

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive correlation between self-efficacy before employment and employment outcome.

In order to test Hypothesis IV, a pearson r was conducted, on study respondents (n=57) data to determine the strength and direction of the correlation that existed between self-efficacy before employment and employment outcome. The pearson r, conducted at the 0.05 significance level, was found not to be statistically significant. This means there is no significant correlation between self-efficacy before employment and employment outcome. Based on the results of the analysis hypothesis IV was rejected.

Table 4. Correlation Between Study Respondents Self –Efficacy Before Employment and Employment Outcome After Treatment

Self-esteem	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
*A	-.064	.319
B	.050	.355
C	.050	.355
D	-.143	.144
*E	.012	.466
F	-.155	.125